



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabad, Ambassador Ibrahim Djikic

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 17, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you. It is again a pleasure to welcome you to the Permanent Council and to hear your views on the important work the OSCE is doing, and can continue to do, in Turkmenistan.

The United States supports fully the work done by the Center in all three dimensions. We are pleased by what appears to be an increasing level of cooperation between the Government of Turkmenistan and the OSCE. We hope this cooperation will continue and result in increased progress in areas such as democratic reform and increased respect for human rights throughout the country.

Since the February 11th presidential elections in Turkmenistan, we have seen some important changes take place that we hope will impact positively on the lives of the country's citizens. In particular, the President's announced plans to improve the educational system and to increase internet access for the public and in schools appear to be wise investments in Turkmenistan's future.

An important part of the democratic process is being responsive to the needs of citizens, and in this regard we note several new developments where the OSCE Mission could be helpful if the Government of Turkmenistan so requested. This includes the Government's new national security code, slated to go into effect on June 1st, and which has been welcomed by local observers as a major step forward to protect social welfare and support war veterans, retirees, and the disabled. The establishment and functioning of a presidential state commission to consider citizens' appeals regarding activities of law enforcement agencies could help set the stage for increased public confidence in local authorities, and is another area where other OSCE Missions have played a helpful role vis-à-vis their host governments.

These are all positive steps, and we encourage the Government of Turkmenistan to continue on this path toward improving the lives of its citizens. Even bigger challenges lie ahead, including reforming election legislation; holding free, fair, transparent and truly competitive elections; strengthening civil society by allowing NGOs to register and operate freely; lifting restrictions of freedom of expression and media; protecting human rights; and building democratic institutions. We encourage the Government of Turkmenistan to draw upon the OSCE's expertise and assistance in meeting these challenges. We note that the government invited an OSCE Election

Support Team to the February 11th presidential elections, and we hope this will pave the way for future, closer cooperation with ODIHR.

Another important area for cooperation between Turkmenistan's authorities and the OSCE lies in the crucial area of border management and security. This is an issue that affects us all. We hope that we will be able to draw on a successful border assessment in Turkmenistan to set the stage for improved border management and security throughout the region.

In closing, we would like to commend you, Mr. Ambassador, and your excellent team in Ashgabat for tenacity and dedication to duty. We wish continued success in this important work in Turkmenistan.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.